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Claremont McKenna College

Exploring the Politics of Fear and its Intersection with
Anti-Asian Violence and Discrimination in the Context of
the COVID-19 Pandemic



submitted to

Dr. Albert Park

by

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for

Senior Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the linkage between the politics of fear and anti-Asian sentiment and violence following the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Canada and Australia. While anti-Asian sentiment is not new, society does not always address it or educate people on the Asian experience. Throughout the history in which Asians arrived in both Canada and Australia, what started with Chinese exclusion in the late 1800s, led to further discrimination in society leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. The early foundations of mistrust and disgust towards Asians in Canada and Australia made the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic worse for Asians residing in these countries because of the scary uptick in anti-Asian violence and racism during the pandemic.

Keywords: anti-Asian racism, political fear, COVID-19, Model Minority Myth

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Introduction

Motivation

To start, I want to clarify that anti-Asian sentiment is not something that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Asian attitudes have persisted for over two centuries, especially in Western, predominantly white, liberal democracies.

I chose this topic because after living through a pandemic for the last two years, Asians worldwide have seen an increase in violence, racism, and discrimination. While I have been privileged to take courses in Asian American studies and have learned more about the marginalization of Asians within the American context, I wanted to know more in the context of predominantly white, liberal democracies with larger percentages of Asian immigrants and naturalized Asian citizens. I have tried to understand why the world has treated Asians this way. On a personal note, we are all human, and it is incredibly saddening to see headline after headline of more racist attacks against people who look like me. Before the pandemic, Asian people across the world faced many obstacles. White culture and the Model Minority Myth deny many of these experiences and setbacks. The Model Minority Myth describes Asians as “a polite, law-abiding group who have achieved a higher level of success than the general population through some combination of innate talent and pull-yourselfes-up-by-your-bootstraps immigrant striving” attitudes.¹ The Model Minority Myth is prevalent in many countries outside the

¹ Sarah-Soonling Blackburn, “What Is the Model Minority Myth?,” *Learning for Justice*, March 21, 2019, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-the-model-minority-myth>.

US regardless of its consideration as an Asian American studies term. I still clearly remember a fellow college student denying the purpose of Asian American studies and Asian Immigrant issues, entirely playing into the Model Minority Myth, even after I had explained how the Model Minority affected me and my upbringing.

Lastly, I believe that the world should address the Asian experience more. While this may be my own opinion, it is something about which I am passionate. One of the goals of my thesis is to educate more people about the use of fear in the context of the Asian experience in predominantly white, liberal democracies. Since the Model Minority Myth strongly affects the perception of Asian people, understanding the struggles and discrimination Asian people face is important in challenging anti-Asian racism and discrimination.

Background

Asian bodies and lives have not been taken seriously or deemed important. For example, a 2021 *National Public Radio* article states based on a survey of Americans, “42% in the U.S. can’t name a single prominent Asian American.”² While this study is focused on American attitudes towards Asians, it still demonstrates the fact that Asians are not seen as a prominent population in American society, and it translates to much of the Western world. In America however, Vice President Kamala Harris identifies as APIDA (Asian Pacific Islander Desi American) demonstrating the disappointing survey results. Furthermore, my research uncovered the significant intertwining between

² Dustin Jones, “42% in the U.S. Can’t Name a Single Prominent Asian American, a Survey Finds,” *National Public Radio*, May 16, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/16/997346466/80-of-asian-americans-say-they-are-discriminated-against>.

Western, predominantly white, liberal democracies views and treatment of Asians. Interestingly, post British colonial nations such as the United States, Canada, and Australia have taken similar positions on immigration policies and social beliefs towards non-white immigrants. In this thesis, I focus my analysis on East Asian immigrants. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, governments in Australia, Canada, and the United States aggressively regulated Chinese immigration. Common anti-Chinese attitudes originated from the fears of job security, public health concerns, and fears of racial minorities gaining too much power and equality.³ These fears often stemmed from stereotypes such as the unclean Chinaman, powerless male Chinese laborer, effeminate Chinese man, and more. In the early 1900s American media, *Broken Blossoms* portrayed Asians in an extremely negative manner, employing white actors to dress in yellowface to portray Chinese people.⁴ In addition, the main character of the film, Cheng Huan also develops an addiction to opium, which was another negative stereotype towards Chinese men at this time. While these stereotypes turned into fears that tainted the early Asian experience in Western, predominantly white, liberal democracies, they also foundationally skew the perception of Asians globally.

Furthermore, the perception of Asian tourists across Europe is negative and dehumanizing. For example, “In 2015, a train system in Switzerland designated specific cars for “Asian tourists,” complete with signs in the bathroom explaining how to use the toilet. While the subway had just enough tact to use the more general term “Asian,”

³ W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, Third Edition (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002): 32. and Greg Watters, “Contaminated by China,” in *Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, ed. Agnieszka Maria Sobocinska and David Walker (Crawley, WA, Australia: UWA Publishing, 2012)

⁴ *Broken Blossoms*, directed by Director D.W. Griffith (United Artists, 1919).

Swiss newspapers had no such qualms, stating outright that the train cars were specifically for Chinese tourists.”⁵ The Swiss train company’s creation of cars for Asian tourists highlights the incidents of discrimination towards Asian tourists in Europe. While it can be assumed that these tourists know how to use the bathroom, the blatant belief that the Chinese cannot handle using the bathroom properly highlights the negative perceptions and dehumanization of Asians in Europe pre-COVID-19.

Politics of Emotion

Within the study of International Relations, emotions are affected by what governments portray and what the public perceives as threats. Emotions also influence government reactions and state behaviors. In his journal article “Theorizing States’ Emotions,” Brent Sasley defines the state as both government officials and citizens, while keeping in mind that minority groups that may be naturalized citizens don’t always feel included in the state. He goes on to argue that “the sense of belonging to the state means that citizens of the state, including decision makers, share their psychological-emotional identification with the group enough to react as a group to an event or development. In turn, this impacts on foreign policies.”⁶ The psychological impact of threats and events as a group highly impacts the ramifications of negative behaviors towards minorities who are not ‘qualified’ to be in the group.

⁵ Elena Zhang, “The Ugly Way We Treat Chinese Tourists,” *The Establishment* (blog), July 25, 2016, <https://medium.com/the-establishment/the-troubling-perpetuation-of-chinese-tourist-stereotypes-1ca94b5f5176>.

⁶ Sasley, Brent E. “Theorizing States’ Emotions.” *International Studies Review* 13, no. 3 (2011): 452–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23016718>.

Within International Relations, various singular emotions have been studied to understand the impacts on different countries' foreign and domestic policies. Out of the emotions studied in International Relations, fear is one of the most effective emotions that different governments and policymakers take advantage of.⁷ Governments use fear as a political tool to influence the public in favor of various policies, political stances, and campaigns.

Why Fear?

The perception of fear is often psychologically linked to the majority becoming uncomfortable with a minority gaining equal power or rights. Fear can invoke the most extreme responses especially when relayed from esteemed authority figures. Fear becomes political when governments take advantage of its power. Politically, fear can be used as a tactic to undermine the legitimacy of minority groups. While fear is often echoed by the media, government sanctioned statements influence these messages. At the same time, the government can also use and exploit the media to increase the potency of potential threats. In describing the culture of fear within society, Holger Mölder states:

A culture of fear most effectively [...] emphasizes a state of war between international actors. It may provoke extremist challenges against peace and stability and conflicting ideologies compose a powerful agenda for initiating fear-based polarizations. Fear in the hands of ideologies has an enormous capability to provoke irrational decisions and security dilemmas.⁸

⁷ American Psychological Association. (2020, October 13). *Fear: A powerful motivator in elections*. <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/fear-motivator-elections>

⁸ Holger Mölder, "The Culture of Fear in International Politics – A Western-Dominated International System and its Extremist Challenges" 14 (January 1, 2011): 260.

What Mölder does not mention in his argument is that race also matters within what Sasley defines as states. Within the culture of political fear, state actors often use imagery of the Other, which normally manifests as non-white races, to scapegoat, instill fear towards a minority group, or to unite the state. In uniting the “state,” the definition of the people is subjective, while certain groups may fit the category of citizen, minority groups within this category may not be viewed as members of the state based on appearance, beliefs, or socioeconomic status.

Preview of Findings

I have based my arguments on political and social fear because in the last two years as an Asian American, I have personally felt an increased sense of fear for my grandparents, parents, relatives, and myself. Furthermore, I wanted to write about fear and its relation to anti-Asian sentiment in Australia and Canada because I wanted to learn more about the Asian experience outside of the United States. Canada and Australia pose two interesting case studies because they both have very high Asian immigration rates and, are post British colonial states, like the United States.

I uncovered in my research that time and time again, both Australian and Canadian governments construct fear in order to achieve political or social goals. In the case of Anti-Asian sentiment, Australia and Canada both constructed fears of too many Asians immigrating to their respective countries. And in response to this fear, they followed other western, predominantly white liberal democracies in banning the immigration of Chinese people, which led to broadly banning all Asian immigration.

Early Canadian immigration policies towards non-white immigrants harshly denied their arrival. At the time, political leaders instituting these policies wanted to maintain Canada's whiteness, and in doing so, during the Goldrush and construction of railroads in the late 1800s, the Canadian government slowly began to implement stricter immigration laws on Chinese individuals. Heavy taxes on Chinese immigrants eventually led to fully barring Asian immigrants from entering the country. While these policies existed until 1965, it is important to understand that these early systemic regulations have laid the foundation for future mistrust and discrimination towards Asians.

In addition to Chinese Exclusion, during World War II, Japanese Canadians and Japanese people living in Canada were sent back to Japan or imprisoned in work camps, similar to what the United States implemented in response to fear of Japanese espionage during World War II. Japanese internment serves as another example of the Canadian government's production of irrational fear of Japanese Canadian citizens. It also further vilifies an Asian ethnicity and furthers the narrative of suspicion towards Asians in Canada.

In Australia, political figures in the early 1900s took advantage of building a white national identity in the establishment of Australia as a united country. The intentions of creating a white state allowed for the discrimination of minority groups and created an environment for discriminatory policies to be accepted. Following the gold rush in Australia, the government wanted to mitigate the increase in skilled laborers from China due to the fear of job security and having too many non-white people. In doing so, they implemented taxes on Chinese immigrants that later led to a full ban on Chinese immigration, and then more broadly to ban all Asian immigration. Australia also blamed

Chinese immigrants for disease outbreaks in the early 1900s, furthering the belief that Chinese people were dirty and were not to be trusted. Like Canada, the Australian government also cooperated in interning Japanese Australians, and other Japanese people from other nations after fears of Japanese espionage.

I chose to write about Canada because of its reputation as a nation free of discrimination.⁹ Under this impression, I was surprised to read a multitude of articles about the anti-Asian violence and racism happening at an even more alarming rate than the United States. Canada has also seen high rates of Asian immigration, and I thought it would pose an interesting case study based on my knowledge of Asian American history. I chose to write about Australia because of its proximity to Asia, the high rate of Asian immigration, and its large population of Asian Australians. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the Australian government produced anti-Chinese rhetoric in political statements and the media exacerbated these negative portrayals. I wanted to understand the foundations of these statements and understand Australia's position in perpetuating Asian discrimination and racism. Overall, these two case studies have demonstrated the deep-rooted anti-Asian sentiments in both countries and have exemplified the lasting consequences of politicizing race and fear.

Thesis Overview and Roadmap

This thesis will highlight the political mechanisms of fear in International Relations and its intersection with anti-Asian sentiment and violence in Canada and

⁹ Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Less Racial Discrimination in Canada, or Simply Less Racial Conflict?: Implications of Comparisons with Britain," *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 14, no. 4 (1988): 424–41, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3550414>.

Australia. I will first discuss the politics of fear, the mechanisms of fear, and then explain the greater implications of anti-Asian sentiment which stems from constructed fear. Each chapter in my analysis will cover the history of Asian immigration and anti-Asian sentiment in Canada and Australia and will cover the implications and intersections between Asian Immigration and fear, leading to anti-Asian sentiment. Then I will discuss the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the government responses, fear instilled by politicians, and public's response highlight the consequences of deep rooted anti-Asian rhetoric.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework of Fear

Introduction

In international politics, national security is defined as “the ability of a state to cater for the protection and defence of its citizenry.”¹⁰ It is an important factor in foreign policy decision-making. Within the realm of national security, emotions affect policymakers and how they assess severity of threats, how they react to these threats, and the types of policies governments proactively implement in order to avoid these threats in the future. Fear is “an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat” as defined by Oxford’s Lexico.¹¹ Fear affects people’s perceptions of and reactions to threats. It can also act as mechanism governments use to assert dominance and maintain power. In modern society, fear can be constructed by multiple parties, but it has significant effects on the public when constructed from the top-down. That is, on an individual level, the urgency of threats can be perceived as much more severe when delivered by “reliable” individuals and institutions rather than when delivered from less distinguished sources. Although “reliability” and “notable sources” are subjective and are often polarized in many countries, political and economic power influences the public perception of threats and has the potential to motivate certain groups to create further divides.

¹⁰ Segun Osisanya, “National Security Versus Global Security.” *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/national-security-versus-global-security>.

¹¹ “Fear,” in *Lexico Powered by Oxford*, n.d., <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/fear>.

In international politics, politicians and governments often manipulate perceived threats driven by fear under the premise of keeping the public safe. At the same time, the public expects their government to make decisions that both counter threats and maintain public safety and security. In efforts to protect, a government's actions towards threats may lead to targeting marginalized groups. Robert Higgs argues, “When the government fails to protect the people as promised, it always has a good excuse, often blaming some element of the population—scapegoats such as traders, moneylenders, unpopular ethnic or religious minorities.”¹² These actions often influence reactions out of the public that impacts the social and political status quo. These actions also highlight similar rhetoric following the onset of COVID-19 in America. This chapter will both provide a framework for the construction of fear and its political and social impact on foreign and domestic policy. It will also discuss the consequences of resorting to fear-based policies in order to better understand the intersection between anti-Asian violence and the construction of fear.

Existing Literature

To start, Shiping Tang argues that “state behaviors can generate uncertainty and fear in other states, which can then exacerbate the security dilemma.”¹³ Tang demonstrates that within the realm of international politics, anticipation and fear of other states’ behaviors can cause governments to react in certain ways to preserve their own

¹² Robert Higgs, “Fear: The Foundation of Every Government’s Power,” *The Independent Review* 10, no. 3 (2006): 454.

¹³ Shiping Tang, “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 18, 2009): 597, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410903133050>.

national security. States generally tend to put their own people first. But what do these people look like? In terms of race and policy, policies and government positions often affect marginalized groups, yet little to nothing is done to stop it. Jayati Srivastava moves this point further by arguing, fear in politics can be used to “sway public opinions, pit ‘Self’ against the ‘Other’ and scare people into submission to public authority as it tugs at the deepest and darkest concerns of human mind and often conflicts with reason.”¹⁴

Srivastava highlights the idea that fear can be used in politics to create divides between a majority and minority. The fear of the Other has significantly shaped politics, and:

in Western societies, epidemics were often interpreted as a defilement of the social order by a dirty and depraved Other. This Other invariably included racial minorities but also comprised the poor, disempowered and inarticulate. These groups became scapegoats who could be identified, shamed and punished for bringing disease into an otherwise healthy society.¹⁵

Tang lays the groundwork for why governments and stakeholders are susceptible to fear, Srivastava, Taras, and Watters further the conversation adding the dimension of the Other, and the government’s role in projecting negative perceptions of the Other onto minority groups.

Furthermore, Taras argues that regardless of fear coming from the government or from individuals, it can be used politically to produce maximum effects on the public.¹⁶

Taras underscores the effectiveness of fear and its ability to influence public opinion. Not only can it have maximal effects on the public, but these maximal effects can change the

¹⁴ Jayati Srivastava, “Fear in International Politics: The Long Shadow of State,” September 22, 2020: 1, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/09/22/fear-in-international-politics-the-long-shadow-of-state/>.

¹⁵ Watters, “Contaminated by China,” 31.

¹⁶ Raymond Taras, “Fear and Suspicion in Contemporary Politics,” in *Fear and the Making of Foreign Policy, Europe and Beyond* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 6-7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b4cp.4>.

treatment of certain minority groups with a singular speech, tweet, or statement. For example, in February 2020, attacks in New Delhi, India that killed 53 people, 40 of them Muslim sparked outrage in India when the government failed to properly investigate the allegations that “BJP leaders incited violence and police officers were complicit in attacks... ‘The BJP’s embrace of the Hindu majority at the expense of minorities has seeped into government institutions, undermining equal protection of the law without discrimination,’ said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch. ‘The government has not only failed to protect Muslims and other minorities from attacks but is providing political patronage and cover for bigotry.’”¹⁷ While the Indian BJP may not have anticipated the public for the attacks against mostly Muslim victims, it highlights their desire to cater towards a majority and disregard the minority out of fear of minorities having seemingly more protection. Holger Mölder adds to the discussion by stating the advantages for politicians when they utilize fear both during campaigns and to push different policy initiatives.¹⁸ As Taras explained, politicians know fear can cause maximum effects on the public, and Mölder explains that politicians take advantage of this to push their own policy initiatives and campaigns. For example, US President Bush’s reelection campaign in 2004 centered around anti-terrorism policy and the Iraq War. After 9/11, fear of terrorism strongly affected the Americans and Bush used it as one of his key initiatives in his successful presidential campaign.

¹⁷ Meenakshi Ganguly **quoted in** “India: Government Policies, Actions Target Minorities,” *Human Rights Watch News*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/19/india-government-policies-actions-target-minorities>.

¹⁸ Mölder, “The Culture of Fear in International Politics – A Western-Dominated International System and Its Extremist Challenges.”

The culture of fear in our society has provided governments with more power in mitigating threats. Frank Furedi states that “Our culture of fear both amplifies the dangers we face and undermines our capacity to engage with the experience of adversity. As a result[,] when we face adversity we do so as vulnerable individuals who are unlikely to cope on [our] own. This is one of the most distinct features of the way we fear.”¹⁹ Furedi explains that in the modern world, the way people fear is designed to make them rely on institutions and social groups, rendering the effects of policies and statements implemented by institutions much more powerful. It also demonstrates the extent to which fear can influence people to justify their own behaviors especially if their institutions support behaviors that harm others. Barry Glassner provides more detail to the culture of fear, and that within this “culture of fear, politicians and advocacy groups use and abuse collective anxieties for narrow political gains. Having helped to instill fears, they capitalize upon them to win elections, to solicit campaign contributions, and to push through pet programs that tend to increase the coercive powers of the state.”²⁰ Glassner further emphasizes how politicians use fear politically to achieve agenda items and to influence the public. Glassner and Furedi highlight the power of fear in its ability to influence and maintain power and indicate how the construction of fear lays the foundation for these outcomes.

¹⁹ Frank Furedi, *Culture of Fear Revisited* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2006), 20, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/claremont/detail.action?docID=5309435>.

²⁰ Barry Glassner, “Narrative Techniques of Fear Mongering,” *Social Research* 71, no. 4 (2004): 826.

Theoretical Framework

What does all of this mean? In the end, these authors have their arguments on the politics of fear, but there is a need to address the link between politics, race, and fear because it is understudied. The way fear has been constructed in society has significantly affected the way certain stakeholders react, the way the public reacts, and it affects only certain groups. Why is this the case? In the early histories of most, if not all predominantly white, liberal, democratic nations, including Canada and Australia, instituted policies have affected people of different races. Such policies were abundant and blatantly discriminated against people of color, and their goals were to maintain political power and to subordinate the “other.” In doing so, foundations were solidified for predominantly white, liberal, democratic nations to adapt racist policies to appear discreet, yet they still exist today and have significant consequences on minority communities of color. Economically and socially, these early policies also allowed the majority of white people to keep better paying jobs and have more social liberties. Giving into fear, and the fear of the other in terms of race has significantly changed the scope of politics and has contributed to continuing disparities between majority and minority communities.

Politicians construct threats from their own fear to instill panic and push policy agendas. In this way, oftentimes, politicians take advantage of threats and fear. Many politicians will use fear to sway public opinion to achieve various political goals.²¹ While working to mitigate threats, this use of fear to change and influence public opinion can be

²¹ Mölder, “The Culture of Fear in International Politics – A Western-Dominated International System and its Extremist Challenges,” 242.

unnecessary and has many associated consequences that have negative impacts.

Following 9/11, Bush's "fear campaign aimed at invading Iraq was precisely timed for the kickoff of the midterm election campaign."²² The US government's actions demonstrate their intent to rally the public to achieve other goals. Similarly, Japan's involvement in World War II instilled fear across North America. Canada's government response to reject Japanese people and intern them in camps, including Japanese Canadians, created a negative view of Japanese Canadians throughout Canada under suspicions that all Japanese people would eventually become spies for Japan.²³ Srivastava also highlights that "states thus need to be forever prepared to deal with any such impending fears not just by other states but by nonstate actors too and hence, there obtains a permanent state of fear."²⁴ The constant state of fear influences many governments to anticipate the worst-case scenario. Srivastava also states that fears can be in reaction to non-state actors, forcing politicians to consider the possibility of threats from the inside. The expectation of the "worst-case scenario" exacerbates a government's reaction to perceived threats.

The culture of fear in contemporary politics also has a component of blame in its nature. Especially in recent years, in reaction to fears, liability and blame is a related response. Frank Furedi explains that historically, people have not always blamed certain parties for accidents:

So how do we assign meanings to acts that were once attributed to chance? Usually, by blaming somebody or some institution for our predicament. It is worth recalling that although more than 20

²² Al Gore, "The Politics of Fear," *Social Research* 71, no. 4 (2004): 779.

²³ Greg Robinson, "Internment of Japanese Canadians." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published February 14, 2017; Last Edited September 17, 2020.

²⁴ Srivastava, "Fear in International Politics: The Long Shadow of State.", 4.

million people died as a result of the influenza pandemic of 1918, there was little finger-pointing or blame. Today, even a small flu epidemic would lead to an outcry against irresponsible officials, politicians or health professionals. Cleansing the term 'accident' from our cultural narrative inexorably leads to a relentless search for someone to blame.²⁵

Reactions to the 1918 influenza pandemic highlight the facet of blame that has arisen since 1918. During the COVID 19 pandemic, President Donald Trump explicitly blamed China and the WHO, for the “spread of COVID-19.”²⁶ Although the virus originated in China, placing blame on a country that other countries have feared because of its political and economic successes demonstrates an additional motive for Trump and other politicians including the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison to speak out against China.²⁷ In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, accusatory statements by significant political figures and subsequent investigations of China’s creation of the virus have amplified negative sentiment towards Asians across the world. These statements highlight the impact of political fear and influence but would be meaningless without the construction of a culture of fear.

²⁵ Frank Furedi, *Culture of Fear Revisited* (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2006): 12, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/claremont/detail.action?docID=5309435>.

²⁶ Scott Neuman, “In U.N. Speech, Trump Blasts China And WHO, Blaming Them For Spread of COVID-19,” *National Public Radio*, September 22, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/09/22/915630892/in-u-n-speech-trump-blasts-china-and-who-blaming-them-for-spread-of-covid-19>.

²⁷ Paul Karp and Helen Davidson, “China Bristles at Australia’s Call for Investigation into Coronavirus Origin,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/29/australia-defends-plan-to-investigate-china-over-covid-19-outbreak-as-row-deepens>.

Case Studies

Between the late 1800s and 1965, the Canadian government wanted to establish a national identity and implemented multiple policies affecting minority groups in order to keep a white majority.²⁸ The fear it created demonized many minority groups immigrating to Canada and existing indigenous populations and stimulated a culture of fear of the Other. Canada faces issues of racism and discrimination within its society because the government was able to cultivate fear of non-white Canadians. Especially within the Asian community in Canada, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the fear of the Other phenomenon, and when combined with blame, Asian Canadians have experienced even more discrimination and racism, in Vancouver alone, incidents went up by 717%.²⁹ The following chapters will uncover why Asians have been susceptible to such high rates of racism and negative sentiment in Canada and Australia, but it is crucial to understand that these sentiments are not new and have been continuously perpetuated by the Canadian government.

Similar to Canada, Australia's government historically subordinated communities of color. This narrative is not new: fears of intrusion from non-white bodies influenced much of early Australian immigration policy. Like Canada, mistreatment of indigenous, or in Australia's case, aboriginal communities plagues its tainted history. Australia's insecurity of non-white groups entering the nation adds more layers to the systemic racism that continues to occur, and all minority groups have been significantly affected

²⁸ Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*.

²⁹ Stephanie Liu, "Reports of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Are Surging in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *CTV News*, March 18, 2021, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/reports-of-anti-asian-hate-crimes-are-surging-in-canada-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-1.5351481>.

by early policies such as the White Australia policy. In addition, China's rise as a global economic superpower has affected the Australian government's perception of China given its increasing dominance over Australia. Negative Chinese rhetoric prior to the COVID-19 pandemic allowed the effects of the pandemic on the Asian community to feel more extreme. The significant rise of racism and animosity towards Asian individuals have been reinforced by government subjugated fear. As a whole, the Asian community within Australia has faced significant hurdles due to the Yellow Peril, and Australia's consistent fear of Asians becoming an equal.³⁰

Conclusion

As a result, the culture of fear in contemporary politics creates an uneasy environment in which politicians use and formulate fear to push desired policy changes. Moreover, politicians craft fear inducing statements under the premise of maintaining national security. Governments choose to use fear to establish power and assert themselves as the protector of the people.³¹ They also use this power to diffuse responsibility. The COVID-19 pandemic was blamed on all Chinese people, and many groups within the Asian diaspora were singled out for this. In the pandemic's case, it just so happened that many Asian communities and populations were blamed for the pandemic, but the pre-existing fear fueling this blame dates back to earlier discrimination from fear of "invasion." Fear allows governments to maintain public obedience. Scholars have discovered the different nuances fear creates in the political atmosphere, but there is

³⁰ Watters, "Contaminated by China."

³¹ Higgs, "Fear: The Foundation of Every Government's Power."

less research on the social and racial/ethnic consequences within this realm of influence.

The following chapters will focus on government involvement in mitigating threats and fear of Asian Immigration, Asian populations establishing citizenship and communities, and the effect of the “virus of fear” (COVID-19) Crisis on Asian communities in Canada and Australia.

Chapter 2: Fear in Canada in Relation to Anti-Asian Sentiment and Violence

Introduction

Fear is a tactful driver in politics and governments have discovered its effectiveness without realizing its dire consequences. Fear in Canadian society has driven policies, citizens' reliance on the government, and social norms. The Canadian government is guilty of constructing fear to garner public support and approval. In doing so, social cleavages have widened because of fear. While fear takes a variety of forms in the realm of politics, this chapter studies the construction of fear in Canada within the political and social spheres and its intersection with anti-Asian sentiment and violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Construction of Fear in Canada

Many mainstream news outlets in Canada have published a multitude of articles pointing to the government's construction of fear in Canada. The Canadian government often disseminates information in the form of statements, speeches, and policy decisions to maintain fear in society and hold power over citizens.³² Like the United States, as a former colony of Great Britain, Canada was "discovered" by white explorers and was

³² Adam Kingsmith, "Canada and the Politics of Fear: Anti-Terrorism, Surveillance, and Citizenship in a Changing World," *The Narwhal*, December 16, 2014, <https://thenarwhal.ca/canada-politics-of-fear-anti-terrorism-surveillance-citizenship-changing-world/>.

then established as a colony by white settlers. The people who had lived on the land prior to their arrival were never considered or respected. The white settlers went on to fight for Canada's independence from Great Britain, and "since the early days of the nation-state, Canada has struggled to balance the need for immigrants with a desire to keep Canada white."³³ In the beginning, keeping Canada white was a tactic in building white nationalism and uniting the Canadian people. However, the desire to keep Canada white led to a multitude of policies specifically affecting minority groups within Canada, and it negatively impacted all minority groups including Canada's Asian population.

The Canadian government has constructed fear in society most notably through political and social spheres especially in times of crisis. Politically, the Canadian government has taken advantage of what scholars Srivastava, Taras, Mölder, and Glassner have argued, which is outlined in the first chapter. Srivastava demonstrates the creation of the "fear of the Other" that creates uncertainty among Canadians and the Canadian government often takes advantage of these uncertainties and creates "in groups" and "outgroups."³⁴ Within these groups, many of the outgroups lack proper political representation.³⁵ The lack of political representation highlights both the blatant distinction between different groups, and the government's ability to get away with instilling fear in its people because of the lack of proper political representation. Taras underscores what Srivastava describes but takes it further by demonstrating that fear can

³³ Gordon Pon et al., "Asian Canadian Studies Now:," in *Asian Canadian Studies Reader*, ed. Gordon Pon and Roland Sintos Coloma (University of Toronto Press, 2017), 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv1n358nz.6>.

³⁴ Srivastava, "Fear in International Politics: The Long Shadow of State."

³⁵ Celina Caesar-Chavannes and Alex Marland, "Make Way! Creating Space for Change in Canadian Politics," *The Conversation*, March 22, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/make-way-creating-space-for-change-in-canadian-politics-156812>.

have a maximal effect on both the government and the people.³⁶ In Canada's case, much of the time, the government responds to threats, like terrorism by instituting surveillance programs.³⁷ While these programs have intents to get rid of terrorism, it has only further ostracized Muslim-Canadians and other groups that fit the prescribed characteristics of terrorism in Canada.³⁸ Mölder discusses the use of fear in politicians' campaigns and other pushes for public support on new policy initiatives.³⁹ These uses of fear can be seen in examples from Justin Trudeau's recent election campaign which is discussed in further detail below. Scholars in International Relations highlight the necessity of fear in allowing governments to both establish and maintain power over their citizens. However, in doing so, policy decisions in response to fear disproportionately affects different minority groups. This chapter further examines the consequences of Anti-Asian sentiment in Canada and the existing institutional discrimination that laid foundations for responses to Asian Canadians during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Political Fear in Canada

During times of mass immigration, fears of terrorism, elections, and times of uncertainty, political fear has been used to sway public opinions and contribute to polarizing politics and as a mechanism to maintain political power and dominance.

During the first waves of mass Asian immigration to the West, the Canadian government

³⁶ Taras, "Fear and Suspicion in Contemporary Politics."

³⁷ Amy Swiffen and Kris Millett, "Terrorism Laws Target Racism, but What about Racism in the Legal System?," *The Conversation*, November 17, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/terrorism-laws-target-racism-but-what-about-racism-in-the-legal-system-170942>.

³⁸ Swiffen and Millett, "Terrorism Laws Target Racism, but What about Racism in the Legal System?"

³⁹ Mölder, "The Culture of Fear in International Politics – A Western-Dominated International System and its Extremist Challenges."

implemented strict immigration measures, and especially with the rise of anti-terrorist rhetoric, anti-China rhetoric became more prevalent (pre-COVID-19). In a 2015 article for CBC News, Matt Henderson wrote an article surrounding the politics of fear within Canada, and the supposed tradition of political fear when passing legislation. Henderson describes multiple instances in which the Canadian government reacted with instilling fear, for example:

In June 1919, the Canadian government under Robert Borden passed the fastest piece of legislation in Canadian history. This new law was intended to give authorities the ability to deport aliens suspected of directing and contributing to the Winnipeg General Strike. [...] The catalyst for this legislation was fear — fear of the other, fear of a loss of power and fear of the unknown. As Canadians, we have witnessed many examples of this type of behaviour and decision making: The Indian Act of 1876 and other similar incarnations, Chinese exclusion, Ukrainian internment, Japanese internment, the War Measures Act of 1970 and the efforts at the Toronto G20 summit in 2010. [...] Often poor decisions are made out of fear and divisiveness that are not based on evidence or sound logic. An example of this can be seen by the Japanese exclusion legislation signed in 1942 by Louis St. Laurent, then justice minister and future prime minister.⁴⁰

Henderson's article demonstrates the use of fear within Canadian politics, which is not new, and the article also highlights the scapegoating and fear of Asians within Canadian history. As a society, Canada has historically marginalized most of its ethnic minority groups based on stereotypes and with the creation of certain policies, the government has increased the harm towards these groups. For example, within the era of Islamophobia in Canada, Politicians have been able to take advantage of public fears of terrorism. While more recently, the Canadian government has stepped into actively fighting white

⁴⁰ Matt Henderson, "The Politics of Fear: A Canadian Tradition," *CBC News*, March 19, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/the-politics-of-fear-a-canadian-tradition-1.3002283>.

supremist organizations like the proud boys by naming them a terrorist organization.⁴¹

Following the events of 9/11:

The Canadian government directed domestic security infrastructure toward so-called homegrown terrorism. Experts implicitly and explicitly framed it as a new threat linked to Muslim communities. The definition did not include violence motivated by beliefs like Christianity, white supremacy or the hatred of women. Over time, a ‘pervasive system of surveillance’ developed in Canada that targeted Muslim communities. Critics have pointed out its harmful effects, such as pathologizing dissent and criminalizing aspects of Muslim identity.⁴²

After 9/11, Canada experienced great fears of terrorism both within the government and among the public because of its highly publicized nature. The programs the government created to surveil Muslim communities strongly emphasizes the Canadian government’s response to fear and the harsh consequence that Muslim communities now face in light of these actions. This example highlights both the abuse of fear in crafting policies and its detrimental effect on a minority community. It is difficult to find evidence of detrimental effects on white communities in response to what the government classifies as fearful also showing there is increased scrutiny and discrimination when fear is invoked to influence policy specifically affecting communities of color.

In exemplifying Canadian politician’s use of fear in furthering their own political objectives, in the 2019 Prime Minister election, Justin Trudeau pushed fear agendas on voters in order to help win the election.⁴³ “Trudeau ditched his ‘sunny ways’ persona that had swept him to power in 2015 and started hammering away at three smaller parties

⁴¹ Swiffen and Millett, “Terrorism Laws Target Racism, but What about Racism in the Legal System?”

⁴² Swiffen and Millett, “Terrorism Laws Target Racism, but What about Racism in the Legal System?”

⁴³ David Ljunggren, “Raising Voters Fears Helped Trudeau to Victory in Canada: Sources,” *Reuters*, October 24, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-canada-election-trudeau-strategy-idCAKBN1X217S>.

on the left, warning their supporters that if they didn't vote Liberal, the progressive vote would splinter and allow the opposition Conservatives to take power."⁴⁴ Trudeau took advantage of progressive voters in order to win his reelection campaign showing the multidimensional use of fear within Canadian politics.

In recent years, China's rise as one of the world's new superpowers has also instilled fear and anxiety in governments across the world. Jeremy Paltiel highlights the changing atmosphere of Canadian Chinese relations in which:

First, China's spectacular growth and expansion of its power in multiple dimensions reversed our positioning in the scales of global influence; second, economic success has reinforced, rather than attenuated the centrality of the Communist Party in its political system, belying assumptions about the corrosive effects of market economics on its authoritarian regime; and third, the rise of nativist and protectionist populism under Donald Trump (partially in reaction to relative loss of US power attendant on globalization and the rise of China) has shifted the grounds beneath our alliance.⁴⁵

Since Trump's presidency in the United States, Canada has had to shift its position on China to economically survive. Trump's extreme stance in changing the terms of free trade agreements between Canada and the United States forced Canada to look elsewhere for essential free trade agreements. In doing so, Canada bolstered its relationship with China to compensate for the gaps in their trading policies. However, before Trudeau, conservative leadership feared China's rise and trajectory, and their public distrust towards the Chinese government had the ability to greatly influence public opinion and approval of China. In doing so, this has only added to the existing negative sentiments towards China and Chinese people (and more times than not, all Asian Canadians are

⁴⁴ Ljunggren, "Raising Voters Fears Helped Trudeau to Victory in Canada: Sources."

⁴⁵ Jeremy Paltiel, "Facing China," *International Journal* 73, no. 3 (2018): 344.

grouped into this based on appearance). Since there is a large Chinese Canadian population throughout Canada, these statements and positions have affected many Asian Canadians, and have sparked a rise in anti-Asian rhetoric and sentiment even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social Fear in Canada

From the very beginning, people of color have not been welcomed in Canada.⁴⁶ The early government enforced exclusionary actions demonstrate the severity of the Canadian government and peoples' fear of non-white individuals arriving and achieving normality in society. For example, in the late 1800s, Canada saw an increase in Asian immigration, specifically an increase in Chinese workers for the railroads. W. Peter Ward describes the common perceptions of Chinese people during this time by describing John Chinaman, a popular caricature in North America from the late 1800s that negatively portrays Chinese people as uncivilized, dirty, and other harsh stereotypes. Ward states:

One persistent belief was that he was unclean... In 1884, for example, before the installation of underground sewers, the back alleys of Victoria's Chinatown displayed 'all the combined waste from the laundries, saloons, restaurants, and other places on Johnson and Government streets ... while oozing from the outhouses is the rankest of filth, all combined rendering the atmosphere of the place so poisonous with stench as to be almost unbearable.'⁴⁷ [...] The popular understanding was that the Chinese lived in rooms crammed with four or five times as many occupants as any white would tolerate. According to rumour, they slept three and four a bed, sometimes even in shifts. A few whites saw this as another sign of Chinese frugality; many others, however, considered it further proof that the race was debased. Most believed that such living conditions were a threat to the public health. 'Their quarters,' it was predicted in 1884, 'would be centres

⁴⁶ Laura J. Kwak, "Problematizing Canadian Exceptionalism: A Study of Right-Populism, White Nationalism and Conservative Political Parties," *Oñati Socio-Legal Series* 10, no. 6 (January 11, 2019): 1170-1171.

⁴⁷ *Colonist*, Nov. 1, 1884. **quoted in** Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 7.

from which contagion would spread all around, and thus diseases not otherwise dangerous might readily become epidemic.⁴⁸ [...] The Chinese threatened pestilence was a matter of general agreement. It was a commonplace in the late nineteenth century that the Orient was ravaged by virulent, disgusting diseases. White British Columbians shared these assumptions and until long after the turn of the century the public mind linked Chinese immigrants with the possibility of epidemics. Smallpox, cholera, and leprosy were particularly feared, especially during the years before immunization became a standard public health procedure.” (7).⁴⁹

The public perception that Chinese people were unhygienic and lived in dirty conditions created a sense of social fear among non-Asian Canadians and led to an “othering” of Asian Canadians during the early years of establishing community. The discrimination from Canadian people highlights the public’s ability to create fear and allow the government to manipulate this fear for their own gains. The Canadian government responded to assertions of public health fear by instituting harsh immigration policies towards Asians during this time. It was not until the mid-to-late 1900s that the Canadian government abolished these strict Asian immigration policies. It is also important to note, that later in the chapter Ward notes that Chinese people were never actually linked to any diseases, yet the public held onto the perception of Chinese individuals as disease-spreading animals.⁵⁰

History of Asians in Canada

There is an extensive history of Asians in Canada from immigration to taxation to exclusion to exilement and inculcation. In 1788, the first documented Asian settlers

⁴⁸ Royal Commission (1885), p. 87, testimony of James Young. **quoted in** Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 7.

⁴⁹ Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 7.

⁵⁰ Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 8.

arrived in Canada. It has been argued that throughout early Canadian history, the majority white population disliked Asian immigration because of the economic tensions created by distrust and fears of job insecurity, especially during the construction of the railroads in Canada and the Gold Rush. However, more recently scholars have added nuances to this argument, blatantly stating that anti-orientalism in early Canadian history was more closely related to racism and the psychological factors (such as fear of the other) rather than the widely prescribed argument about economic tensions.⁵¹ W. Peter Ward has published multiple editions of his study on anti-Orientalism in Canada. Specifically, his research highlights the anti-Orientalist attitudes that existed when the first Asians arrived in Canada have only increased. Fear of Asians has existed throughout history because of lasting stereotypes, racism, and discriminatory policies implemented by the government continue to fuel these emotions.

Ethnic Studies and Asian Canadian Studies provide more context to the treatment of minority groups during early Canadian history. In a book advocating for Asian Canadian Studies, Gordon Pon and other authors highlight the Asian Canadian experience and argue that “Canada’s political and economic development is similar to that of other settler societies, involving subordinating Indigenous peoples and developing the capitalist economy as a ‘foundation for the policies of slavery, marginalization and socio-economic exclusion of racialized immigrants.’⁵²”⁵³ Overall, Anti-Asian sentiment

⁵¹ Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, IX.

⁵² Galabuzi, Grace-Edward. 2006. *Canada’s Economic Apartheid: The Social Exclusion of Racialized Groups in the New Century*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press. **quoted in** Pon et al., “Asian Canadian Studies Now,” 3.

⁵³ Pon et al., “Asian Canadian Studies Now,” 3.

in Canada has persisted since the arrival of Chinese immigrants in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Much of the negative sentiment rooted in job insecurity concerns are very similar to reactions in the United States and Australia during this time.

As a Western, predominantly white, liberal democracy, many of the experiences of people of color in Canada are experienced in many other Western, predominantly white, liberal democracies with high rates of Asian immigration. Furthermore, “The legislated racism against the Chinese in Canada from 1885 to the early twentieth century was buttressed by popular cultural, political, and social discourses that constructed Asians, particularly Chinese men, as the “Yellow Peril,” which threatened to displace white European immigrants.”⁵⁴ This exemplifies the justification for the discrimination of Asians in the later decades of the 1800s. The Canadian government, like other predominantly white, liberal democracies, wanted to keep Canada white. In doing so, the legislative acts passed to keep Asians out of the country have perpetuated the idea that Asians are perpetual foreigners, regardless of if they are naturalized citizens and have established their own families and lives in Canada. However, because in the past it has been argued that because Asians are the Model Minority in Canada, their experiences and oppression have been downplayed and their experiences have been invalidated. However, as Asian American, and Asian Canadian studies have affirmed, the Model Minority is a Myth.⁵⁵

Although the term Model Minority appears frequently in Asian American studies literature and Asians in Canada have experienced similar discrimination, their

⁵⁴ Pon et al., “Asian Canadian Studies Now,” 5-6.

⁵⁵ Pon et al., “Asian Canadian Studies Now,” 15.

experiences are hardly talked about because of the Model Minority Myth. In proving this, “anti-Asian racism wasn’t mentioned in Canada’s 2019 anti-racism strategy.”⁵⁶ The failure to recognize anti-Asian racism has yet another effect on anti-Asian violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, anti-Asian sentiment and racism was hardly discussed outside the Asian community. The lack of discussion and education on the Asian experience has significantly affected the way Asians perceive themselves in society and has allowed others to believe that anti-Asian racism does not exist.

Throughout its history as an established nation, Canada has exhibited harsh treatment towards and discrimination against Asians both blatantly and discreetly. After initially implementing the Chinese Head tax for Chinese individuals entering Canada, the Chinese Immigration Act (also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act) in 1923 banned Chinese people from immigrating to Canada.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Chinese Canadians were not granted the right to vote until 1948, and Japanese Canadians were granted their right to vote shortly after in 1949 even though Asian Canadians were citizens and had been in Canada for more than a few decades.⁵⁸ Although Chinese immigrants helped construct the Canadian railroad, “Upon completion of the railway, intense fear, hatred, and demonization of Asian people characterized Canadian society.”⁵⁹ It did not matter the extent to which Chinese immigrant workers helped Canadian society, they were still

⁵⁶ Avvy Go **quoted in** Angela Francis, “The ‘model Minority’ Myth Explained. What You Need to Know about How It Has Propped up Anti-Asian Racism in Canada,” *The Toronto Star*, March 27, 2021, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2021/03/27/the-model-minority-myth-explained-what-you-need-to-know-about-how-it-has-propped-up-anti-asian-racism-in-canada.html>.

⁵⁷ Diamond Yao, "Anti-Asian Racism in Canada." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. Article published November 18, 2021; Last Edited March 30, 2022.

⁵⁸ Diamond Yao, "Anti-Asian Racism in Canada."

⁵⁹ Pon et al., “Asian Canadian Studies,” 5.

outcasts and blamed for “taking” jobs.⁶⁰ Perpetual discrimination towards Asians in Canada has allowed space for the continued mistreatment of Asians.

Furthermore, the treatment of Japanese people in Canada was also impacted by negative perceptions and assumptions. Following World War II, Japanese Canadians were interned in camps, the government confiscated all their belongings and property, they were treated as prisoners, and were forced to hard labor in these camps. Although many of these Japanese Canadian citizens had no strong connection to Japan beyond ethnicity. Despite having no evidence of collusion, all Japanese Canadians were treated as traitors and spies, and:

Approximately 4,000 Japanese Canadians were deported to Japan. 66 per cent of those deported were Canadian citizens by birth or naturalization. Many of them had never been to Japan. It was only on 1 April 1949 that Japanese Canadians were allowed to move freely again across Canada. On 22 September 1988, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney formally apologized and provided compensation on behalf of the federal government for its actions during the war.⁶¹

The internment of Japanese Canadians is an extremely similar occurrence to what happened to Japanese Americans, yet it is still not talked about, and it took the Canadian government nearly 3 decades to formally apologize for their brutal and unwarranted actions. More importantly, 66% of the Japanese people that were deported back to Japan were already Canadian citizens. The fear of the “Orient” / Asian immigration in the 20th century laid the foundations for more discriminatory policies along with future discrimination of Asians within politics and society.

⁶⁰ Paul Yee, “History of Canada’s Early Chinese Immigrants,” Library and Archives Canada, April 19, 2017, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/early-chinese-canadians/Pages/history.aspx>.

⁶¹ Diamond Yao, "Anti-Asian Racism in Canada."

The parallels between Canada and other Western, predominantly white liberal democracies are apparent. Many predominantly white, liberal democracies have periods in which Asians were barred from immigrating, not allowed to vote, and even when they were treated “better” than other racial minority groups, they still faced discrimination and racism. This treatment of Asians from the beginning laid the foundation for Asians to be perceived as the ‘perpetual foreigner,’ disease-prone / dirty immigrant, and a Model Minority: a smart, hardworking, and passive/timid person.⁶² These problematic attitudes towards the Asian minority group promote further discrimination and racism because they minimize and invalidate the issues Asians face. Regardless of whether Asians are successful, the existing barriers to become successful are steeper than many realize.⁶³

In providing the historical background, it becomes apparent that the mistreatment of Asian Canadians is not a new phenomenon, and that this mistreatment is largely due to fear. Fear of the Orient dates to the Roman Empire, and it has continued throughout much of Canada’s early history. As stated in Raymond Taras’ book: *Fear and the Making of Foreign Policy: Europe and Beyond*, “There is nothing ‘unnatural’ about the rejection of the other. Psychoanalysis identifies stranger-anxiety in infants as the earliest manifestation of our rejection of others.”⁶⁴ As noted earlier, in Canada’s early years as a nation, the Canadian government strived to keep Canada white. Taras’ book highlights the psychology of strangers and outgroups, and while it doesn’t justify exclusion and

⁶² Rob Ho, “Do All Asians Look Alike?: Asian Canadians as Model Minorities,” *Studies on Asia* 4, no. 2 (2014).

⁶³ Chloe Tse, “Why the Bamboo Ceiling Is a Real Thing and How It Hurts All POC,” *The Slice*, March 18, 2021, <https://slice.ca/why-the-bamboo-ceiling-is-a-real-thing-and-how-it-hurts-all-poc/>.

⁶⁴ Raymond Taras, “Fear and Suspicion in Contemporary Politics,” in *Fear and the Making of Foreign Policy, Europe and Beyond* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 13, <http://www.jstor.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b4cp.4>.

mistreatment of racial minority groups, it gives more context to the situation on why Asian people were and are still perceived negatively.

Finally, within the last couple of decades, China's rise has seen a significant amount of media attention that is mostly negative with their highly publicized human rights abuses, significant economic rise, and continuance as an authoritarian regime. China's rise has created large-scale fear and anxiety among Western and Asian Pacific nations.

Canadian Government Response to COVID-19

The Western, anti-China approach to the COVID-19 pandemic had dramatic effects on the Asian communities in countries where China was initially blamed for the pandemic. This resulted in a significant uptick in hate crimes committed towards Asian Canadians in Canada, especially in British Columbia.⁶⁵ Dating back to the brief history of Asians within Canada outlined above, the constant alienation and othering of Asians have clearly affected the way Asians are continued to be perceived in Canadian society. Some argue, Asians in predominantly white, liberal democracies are perceived as perpetual foreigners even though many families have settled in these predominantly white nations for generations.

⁶⁵ Johna Baylon and Leyland Cecco, "Attacks Make Vancouver 'Anti-Asian Hate Crime Capital of North America,'" *The Guardian*, May 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/23/vancouver-anti-asian-hate-crimes-increase>.

Anti-Asian Sentiment and Violence During COVID-19

Following the WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, the Asian community in Canada experienced an unprecedented increase in hate crimes and violence reported to authorities. For example, in British Columbia, "the Vancouver Police Department [reported] anti-Asian increased by 717 per cent from 2019 to 2020. [At the time the article was published], British Columbia also [surpassed] any sub-national region in North America for having the most reported anti-Asian hate crime incidents per Asian capita. Project 1907 also reported that women in particular are disproportionately impacted, making up nearly 70 per cent of all reported incidents in the province."⁶⁶ These numbers are heavily unreported. Due to the Model Minority Myth, Asian communities have been silenced for decades, and, in general, the Asian demographic is less likely to report hate crimes. The uptick in violence and racism towards Asian Canadians highlights the connection between existing negative attitudes and a way to create a cause for the public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the likelihood of violence against Asian-Canadians due to the origin of COVID-19 in China. This is not necessarily surprising given Donald Trump's harsh stance, claims, and tweets about COVID-19 being the "Chinese Virus."⁶⁷ Social media enlarges Trump's audience to the global scale making his tweet that much more dangerous.⁶⁸ Additionally, in a study on the treatment of Asian identifying healthcare workers in Canada and America, "Two major themes emerged from the data: a surge of racial microaggressions related to COVID-19 and a

⁶⁶ Liu, "Reports of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Are Surging in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

⁶⁷ Kimmy Yam, "Trump Tweets about Coronavirus Using Term 'Chinese Virus,'" *NBC News*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/trump-tweets-about-coronavirus-using-term-chinese-virus-n1161161>.

⁶⁸ Yam, "Trump Tweets about Coronavirus Using Term 'Chinese Virus.'"

lack of institutional and public acknowledgement.”⁶⁹ During the pandemic, despite healthcare workers of Asian descent, they were still met with racist remarks and oftentimes, the hospitals and care facilities failed to recognize the unfair mistreatment of their employees. While Prime Minister Trudeau spoke against discrimination of Asians during the COVID-19 pandemic, with social media, and other countries’ politicians casting negative light on China, Trudeau’s speeches didn’t help the spike in violence in the first year of the pandemic.⁷⁰

Effect on Foreign Policy

The implementation of travel bans towards China during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the existing negative sentiment towards Asians. The travel restrictions increased already negative perceptions and racial tensions towards Chinese and Asian people across the world. In the beginning, Prime Minister Trudeau made statements against implementing travel bans specifically on China because of the anticipated negative effects on the Asian Canadian community.⁷¹ While Canada closed its borders to all travel in 2020, the government still reacted to impending fears of the spread of the coronavirus that citizens responded to by blaming Chinese and Asian people.

⁶⁹ Zhida Shang, Jennifer Y Kim, and Shuliang O Cheng, “Discrimination Experienced by Asian Canadian and Asian American Health Care Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Study,” *CMAJ Open* 9, no. 4 (November 16, 2021): E998–1004, <https://doi.org/10.9778/cmajo.20210090>.

⁷⁰ David Staples, “The Road to Canada’s COVID-19 Outbreak, Pt. 2: Timeline of Federal Government Failure at Border to Slow the Virus,” *Edmonton Journal*, April 12, 2020, <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/the-road-to-canadas-covid-19-outbreak-pt-2-timeline-of-federal-government-failure-at-border-to-slow-the-virus-2>.

⁷¹ Staples, “The Road to Canada’s COVID-19 Outbreak, Pt. 2: Timeline of Federal Government Failure at Border to Slow the Virus.”

Conclusion

The Canadian government's role in constructing fear to achieve political goals has led to the out casting of many Asian Canadians. Early government fears of Asians played into the negative rhetoric surrounding Asians throughout Canada's history as an established nation. From Chinese Exclusion to Japanese Internment to the COVID-19 pandemic, Asians have been blamed on various occasions without proper justification. It is most important to note that politician's initial reaction to COVID-19 created a new sense of fear towards Asians, and although this fear is not new, it is related to the significant uptick in anti-Asian related hate crimes both in Canada and globally.⁷²

⁷² Jenn Fang, "The 2003 SARS Outbreak Fueled Anti-Asian Racism. Coronavirus Doesn't Have To.," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/02/04/2003-sars-outbreak-fueled-anti-asian-racism-this-pandemic-doesnt-have/>. and Joanne Lu, "Why Pandemics Give Birth to Hate: From Bubonic Plague to COVID-19," *National Public Radio*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/03/26/980480882/why-pandemics-give-birth-to-hate-from-black-death-to-covid-19>.

Chapter 3: Fear in Australia in Relation to Anti-Asian Sentiment and Violence

Introduction

In Australia, the government has constructed fear through the dimensions of policy and social norms to subordinate Asian populations and establish Australia politically. Australia's history highlights the use of fear in anticipation of the Asian racial group becoming too prominent in Australia. Early Australian immigration policies towards Asians foundationally created senses of mistrust, dis-belonging, and a general sense of fear towards this racial group. These foundations allowed for an explosion in anti-Asian attacks and violence following the COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter, I explore the Australian government's construction of fear in the political and social spheres to better understand the use and influence of fear towards Asians. I will then discuss the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected Asians/Asian Australians.

Construction of Fear in Australia

Prior to gaining independence from Great Britain, fears of outsiders in Australia sparked from the 1854 Eureka Rebellion. The rebellion was "perceived to have been fueled by the presence of Americans with seditious republican values, [and] had already alerted the colonial authorities to the threat to law and order from foreigners. Attention

then focused on the Chinese, with the 1855 report into the rebellion warning of ‘an unpleasant possibility of the future, that a comparative handful of colonists could be buried in a count- less throng of Chinamen.’”⁷³ The restrictions of Chinese immigration first started in certain colonies, then all colonies eventually adapted their immigration policies to limit Chinese immigration into Australia.⁷⁴ Finally, after gaining independence from Great Britain, in the early years of nationhood, Australia used fear as a political and social tool to unite its people and promote an Australian identity. At the time, policymakers believed building upon nationalism was important to fostering Australian identity, and they especially promoted homogeneity within this new identity. In promoting white nationalism, the early Australian government incited negative sentiment towards Chinese immigrants and later, all Asian immigrants which has foundationally affected white Australians’ perception of Asian Australians.

The Australian government has constructed fear towards outsiders and other states to support a national identity and furthermore to establish a white majority. The Australian government’s actions in creating fear can be paralleled to the arguments of Tang, Srivastava, Mölder, and Furedi. As Tang argues, “fear in other states [...can] exacerbate the security dilemma.”⁷⁵ Australia’s belief and fear of outsiders after witnessing Americans act independently highlights Tang’s point. This exacerbation led to Australia’s fear of the other and unknown, and as Srivastava highlights, led to the government pitting a minority against the majority and the Australian government’s

⁷³ Anthony Burke, *Fear of Security: Australia’s Invasion Anxiety* (Cambridge University Press, 2010): 2, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/fear-of-security/6B35002DE2C399016FBDA5D415A903A2>.

⁷⁴ Watters, “Contaminated by China,” 35.

⁷⁵ Tang, “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis.”

promotion of anti-Asian rhetoric which still exists today. In conjunction with the previously mentioned scholars, Mölder's argument is also evidenced in Australia's instituted policies because of the apparent use of fear to gain and maintain political power.⁷⁶ Lastly, Furedi adds in the essential element of reliance upon institutions after the government constructs fear and citizens are susceptible to the threat.⁷⁷ In Australia's case, promotion of the White Australia policy along with government produced anti-Asian / foreigner / nonwhite rhetoric furthered the acceptance and success of the White Australia policy. It also increased support towards the government because citizens felt aligned with the propagated sense of national identity.

Political Fear in Australia

Politically, the Australian government has often used fear to garner public support for policy initiatives. While there is scholarship that blames Australian media for the dissemination of fear inducing rhetoric, fear has always been interpreted from government messaging. The media in Australia not only amplifies the government's statements it also widens the audience base. Following 9/11, western, predominantly white, liberal democracies saw terrorism as an urgent threat. In Australia specifically, Prime Minister John Howard's reelection campaign centered national security at the top of his priorities. In an analysis on media representation of refugees in Australian media during his reelection period, Dr. Peter Gale highlights that "The 'shock jocks' on radio and the front page headlines in the print media reflect a narrative of fear and paranoia in

⁷⁶ Mölder, "The Culture of Fear in International Politics – A Western-Dominated International System and Its Extremist Challenges."

⁷⁷ Furedi, *Culture of Fear Revisited*.

reporting the news through a superficial coverage of both asylum seekers and terrorism.”⁷⁸ Gale also mentions that critiques of media reporting surfaced during this time, however, the main headlines that received most attention centered on the fear and paranoia of outsiders inspired by Prime Minister Howard’s reelection campaign.⁷⁹ Everything Prime Minister Howard stated to the public aligns with Mölder’s argument that politicians take advantage of fear in order to push their own policy or campaign agendas. In this case, Prime Minister Howard fully took advantage of the War on Terrorism prompted by President Bush in the United States to instill fear in citizens and to incentivize people to vote for him. Prime Minister Howard demonstrates the effectiveness of fear in political campaigns in Australia.

Social Fear in Australia

In the earliest months of Australia’s independence from Great Britain, parliament instituted “Australia White Policy” which disallowed immigration from non-white states. Timothy Kendall explains that “through propagating fears about the loss of the white nation-self, the Parliament sought to transform whiteness into a normative national category; [the] Federation sought to indigenise whiteness.”⁸⁰ The government wanted to sustain white nationalism and build upon Australian identity. Because of these desires for a White Australia, the government made strong efforts to keep the “other” out of Australia, the policies instituted from a place of fear not only negatively impacted Asians

⁷⁸ Peter Gale, *A Politics of Fear in Australia: Representations of Refugees in the Media*, 2002, 2.

⁷⁹ Gale, *A Politics of Fear in Australia: Representations of Refugees in the Media*, 2.

⁸⁰ Timothy David Kendall, *Within China’s Orbit?: China Through the Eyes of the Australian Parliament* (Canberra: Dept. of Parliamentary Services, 2008), 9.

already in Australia but affected future immigration prospects. Furthermore, anti-Asian attitudes were also linked to social and medical fear. “Outbreaks of disease [...] are often attributed to outsiders and can precipitate increased racial tensions. The Sydney smallpox epidemic of 1881–82 is a case in point. Most notably, it saw Sydney’s Chinese community exploited as a scapegoat for the public health failings of Sir Henry Parkes’ New South Wales colonial government.”⁸¹ Following the smallpox outbreak in Sydney, Henry Parkes took advantage of the situation, and:

The New South Wales government of Sir Henry Parkes seized upon the assumed Chinese origin of the epidemic to propose discriminatory legislation. In the midst of the panic, Parkes introduced the Restriction of Chinese Immigration Bill, which placed a poll tax of £10 on each Chinese immigrant and limited their number to one for every 100 tons of a ship’s registered weight. These actions had been approved as a response to the increasing numbers of Chinese immigrants by most of the premiers at a conference in January 1881, but Parkes used the smallpox crisis to add further restrictions that declared all Chinese ports, vessels and seamen permanently ‘infected’. This would have resulted in the quarantining of any ship carrying even a single Chinese passenger or seaman, irrespective of the ship’s port of embarkation or disease status. The Chinese were also to be denied other civil rights, including the ownership of real estate and the right to be naturalised. Parkes justified this bill on a number of grounds. He claimed that he had ‘good reason’ to believe that the Chinese had introduced smallpox to the colony through their disregard for cleanliness and their propensity to live in overcrowded conditions. The epidemic showed that there was a ‘necessity of severer precautions against the introduction of malignant diseases from Asiatic countries...[as] experience has shown that such immigration is attended with serious dangers to public health’. Parkes also argued that the Chinese were a ‘class of people who had no affinity with the British character’. They were short-term visitors who would not contribute to the colony’s progress but rather had the potential, because of their vast numbers, to reduce the general standard of living.⁸²

⁸¹ Watters, “Contaminated by China,” 29.

⁸² Watters, “Contaminated by China,” 35.

Parkes used his position in the government to convince both the public and other well respected government officials to trust his claims even though they lacked evidence. His fear of Chinese people and their ability to spread disease highlights a government sanctioned fear that casts negative light on the Chinese community in Australia, and more broadly Asians in Australia at this time.

Following Parkes' implementation of taxes on Chinese immigrants, the Immigration Restriction Bill was passed by Australian parliament under Prime Minister Edmund Barton's term, it enacted the White Australia Policy.⁸³ In Timothy Kendall's book, *Within China's Orbit? Through the eyes of the Australian Parliament*, Kendall presents Keith Windschuttle's argument that White Australia Policy did not have anything to do with race, but with caution for white Australians' job security.⁸⁴ However, regarding Windschuttle's claims, Asian-Invasion literature circulated throughout Australia proves otherwise. In the journal article, "Paranoid Projections: Australian Novels of Asian Invasion," Catriona Ross discusses fearful rhetoric substantiated by Australian national defense security experts within an article in *The Bulletin* arguing climate change will call for an Asian-invasion (rather surplus of Asian immigrants) from 2008. Ross states:

The contemporary issue of climate change may be taken as the catalyst for the predicted disaster, but the substance of the article is a simple reiteration of the narrative of impending Asian threat that has manifested its anxious forecasts throughout white Australian history (not least in the pronouncements of the *Bulletin* in its literary prime over a century ago that contributed to the push for an exclusively white Australia). This article examines the most substantial and detailed textual expression of Australia's ongoing fear of Asian invasion: the sizeable body of popular

⁸³ Bruce C. Mansfield, "The Origins of 'White Australia,'" *The Australian Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1954): 61–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20633481>.

⁸⁴ Kendall, *Within China's Orbit? : China Through the Eyes of the Australian Parliament*.

fiction novels that depict the actualization of the invasion event and provide grim warnings of Australia's potentially Asianized future.⁸⁵

While *The Bulletin* piece has grounding in the climate crisis, using it as another excuse to fear Asian-invasion is perplexing. The article serves as another example of the Australian government furthering estimates of the irrational fear of Asian-invasion. This occurrence is not new in the act of Australia blaming Asian people for things out of their control. Asian-invasion stories like *The Bulletin's* article provide the public more reason to believe there is factual grounding in these narratives.

History of Asians in Australia

As a post British colonial nation, Australia treated Asian immigrants similarly to the United States and Canada. Asian Australian history is marked by anti-Asian sentiment from the very beginning. When some of the first Chinese immigrants arrived in Australia:

In May 1881, the SS Glamis Castle steamed into Sydney Harbour and disembarked 814 Chinese passengers. [...] For many, emigration appeared to be the best chance for survival and by 1881 the prosperity of Australia was well known throughout southern China. Consequently, more than 3,000 Chinese arrived in Sydney in April and May alone. They did not see themselves as permanent settlers but expected to work for a few years, repay the onerous loans they had taken to make the voyage and eventually return to China as prosperous men. The passengers of the Glamis Castle shared these hopes but their welcome to Australia was less than auspicious. They were met by a mob agitated by the Chinese reputation for undercutting wages and destroying employment conditions.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Catriona Ross, "Paranoid Projections: Australian Novels of Asian Invasion," *Antipodes* 23, no. 1 (2009): 11.

⁸⁶ Watters, "Contaminated by China," 27-28.

Prior to Chinese arrival in 1881, existing fear and anti-Asian sentiment clouded the experiences of the first Chinese immigrant workers in Australia. These immigrants left China in search of better opportunities, and as Watters explains, they did not necessarily come to Australia to establish settlement. However, only a few months later, the Chinese were blamed for Sydney's smallpox outbreak. As explained earlier in this chapter, conspiracy theories from Henry Parkes furthered the tensions between the Chinese immigrants and their white counterparts. Parkes ostracized Chinese people and utilized his power as a government official to strip Chinese of civil liberties and other freedoms.⁸⁷ The Australian government periodically scapegoated Chinese people for disease outbreaks, accused them of stealing white Australian's jobs, and never accounted for the potential negative consequences of these actions. Following independence from Great Britain in 1901, the newly independent Australian government implemented measures to mitigate high rates of Chinese immigration that turned more broadly into the restriction of most Asian immigration until the mid to late 20th century. Restrictions imposed by the government were implemented in reaction to widespread fear of Asian people not only "taking" jobs from other Australians, but also the fear that Chinese people were dirty, spread smallpox, and were not civilized enough to be Australian citizens.

While anti-Chinese attitudes persisted in the late 1800s to the early and mid 1900s, World War II also posed challenges for the Asian Australian community. During World War II, Australia also interned Japanese Australians, Japanese people, and Japanese people from other countries. The Australian government also grouped in Taiwanese and Korean individuals due to Japanese colonialism and their suspected links

⁸⁷ Watters, "Contaminated by China," 35.

to the Japanese government. Internment efforts were fear based as the Australian government and other western, predominantly white, liberal democracies feared Japanese espionage. Some conservative scholars fail to mention half of these occurrences in Australian history. Highlighting these moments in Asian Australian history is important because it provides more context to the experiences of early Asian immigrants and also highlights the social and political landscape in Australia during the first decades of its nationhood.

Anti-Asian Sentiment and Violence Pre-COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian-invasion literature and narratives circulated across Australian media and various platforms. During the early 1900s, government officials spread damaging messages warranting a fear of an Asian invasion.⁸⁸ This message has persisted and is seen in a variety of different media types in the twenty-first century. In a journal article studying invasion novels, Ross states:

White Australia's forgetful silence on the colonial invasion is 'not something passive, a loss' but is indeed 'an action directed against the past' that signals the complex operation of cultural memory and its reciprocal parts of remembering and forgetting. Legitimized utterances of white-Australian history are thus implicitly tied to what has been deemed unspeakable. The silence shrouding the realities of the nation's origins is part of a deliberate and active discourse of cultural memory. In this vein, Christine Bold, Rie Knowles, and Belinda Leach argue that active forgetting 'can be understood as hegemonic cultural memory, the experimental 'script' that is learned, embodied, and passed on as the cultural record of normal' (127)⁸⁹. Asian- invasion novels adhere closely

⁸⁸ Nikos Papastergiadis, "The Invasion Complex in Australian Political Culture," *Thesis Eleven* 78, no. 1 (August 1, 2004): 8–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513604044544>.

⁸⁹ Christine Bold, Ric Knowles, and Belinda Leach, "National Counter-memories: Feminist Memorializing and Cultural Counter-memory: The Case of Marianne's Park," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 1 (September 1, 2002): 125–48, <https://doi.org/10.1086/340905>. **quoted in** Ross, "Paranoid Projections: Australian Novels of Asian Invasion," 14.

to the cultural script that enacts a discourse of silence on the reality of the white invasion and the violent practices employed against Australia's Aboriginal peoples. But the repeating and reworking of this cultural script - so distinctly evident in formulaic novels of Asian invasion - create a supplementary residue: the repressed reality that cannot be written out of existence, which then returns to haunt its suppressors. As de Certeau continues, '[...] what was excluded reinfilters the place of origin - it turns the present's feeling of being 'at home' into an illusion' (4).⁹⁰ Asian-invasion novels effectively efface the colonial invasion but are fixated on the recurrence of the invasion event, on the unsettling - the literal unhousing of white Australia in distinctly "unhomely" narrative trajectories.⁹¹

While these narratives of Asian-invasion seem baseless, the lasting rhetoric and fear of Asian-invasion has further cast a negative shadow on Asians in Australia, making the subgroup especially susceptible to future discrimination and racism.

Asian-invasion novels are not the only source of anti-Asian sentiment and rhetoric before the COVID-19 pandemic. China's rise as one of the world's superpowers has also instilled anxiety and fear in Australia and Australian leaders. Since China is both geographically close and has political and economic interests in Australia, Wanning Sun argues China's newer, more powerful position has created a pervasive sense of fear about China's growing authority. The fear of China in the twenty-first century has created an increase in anti-Chinese rhetoric in the media over the past few years.⁹² Sun goes on to say that over the years, media reporting on China has shifted to:

a kind of reporting that takes as given that China is a hostile nation, and that this perception 'legitimizes ways of reporting on China that are adversarial in a pre-determined way.' This adversarial perspective not only dictates what kinds of stories readers should hear and read about China,

⁹⁰ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi, vol. 17, Theory and History of Literature (University of Minnesota Press, 1986). **quoted in** Ross, "Paranoid Projections: Australian Novels of Asian Invasion," 14.

⁹¹ Ross, "Paranoid Projections: Australian Novels of Asian Invasion," 14.

⁹² Wanning Sun, "The Virus of Fear and Anxiety: China, COVID-19, and the Australian Media," *Global Media and China* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436421988977>.

but it also dictates how these stories are told. Accordingly, the ritual of objective reporting, which requires an attempt at balance and the provision of evidence supporting your claims, is no longer necessary. Adversarial journalism in Australia's mainstream English-language media is not just about stories that are critical of China. Rather, it involves the adoption of a pre-determined news-making agenda that privileges a particular point of view—in this case, that of the security and intelligence establishment—at the expense of other perspectives, and the consequently narrow framework for selecting what to cover and how to cover it. This approach to reporting on China had become the norm for several years before COVID-19, and any analysis of how the Australian media reported China's experience with COVID-19 must keep this backdrop firmly in mind.⁹³

In efforts to rally additional support for anti-China policies prior to the pandemic, following government constructions of fear, Australian media outlets produced articles and various negative representations of China to support this rhetoric. Other Western, predominantly white, liberal democracies have used similar tactics to keep nationalist identity alive. Interestingly, in many of these predominantly white, liberal democracies, there are large populations of Asians that are naturalized citizens. Anti-China rhetoric has only increased the grounds for mistrust, ideas that Asian people are perpetual foreigners, and discrimination that has hurt the perception of Asians globally. The Model Minority myth also influences the perception of Asian discrimination. According to a Washington Post article, “The ‘Model Minority’ stereotype often makes it easy for people to dismiss the threat against Asians — we tend to connote, inaccurately, moderate economic success with an immunity to racial discrimination. Yet Asians have long been subjected to stereotypes of being “foreign,” which can lead to discrimination and violence.”⁹⁴ Anti-China rhetoric promotes the idea that citizens should be anti-China and that existing

⁹³ Sun, “The Virus of Fear and Anxiety: China, COVID-19, and the Australian Media,” 25.

⁹⁴ Rennie Lee, Xiao Tan, and Leah Ruppner, “Anti-Asian Bias Isn’t Just an American Problem: The Pandemic Has Revived Old Stereotypes around the World,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/03/26/anti-asian-bias-isnt-just-an-american-problem/>.

Asian communities are not here to stay. Furthermore, according to the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Chin Tan, “Asian-Australians account for... only 3.1 percent of partners in law firms, 1.6 per cent of barristers and 0.8 per cent of the judiciary [...] Research shows that underrepresentation impacts not only the individual, but in areas such as justice, it also has a community and systemic impact.”⁹⁵ Commissioner Tan demonstrates how low levels of Asian representation in higher authority positions in workplace settings adds increased depth to the stereotypes that Asians are powerless individuals.⁹⁶

Government Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic met unprepared countries around the world. While officials were confident the virus was isolated to China, the WHO’s official declaration of the pandemic instilled fear in civilians, governments, and the entire world. Following the WHO’s declaration, in April 2020, the Australian government pushed for an investigation into the Chinese government for their mishandling of the beginning of COVID-19.⁹⁷ In addition, Australia was one of the first countries to close its borders to China. While closing the borders to China was to temporarily mitigate the spread of COVID-19, it parallels Parkes' response to the smallpox outbreak in the early 1900s. This

⁹⁵ Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Chin Tan **quoted in** Bang Xiao and Erin Handley, “How Asian-Australians Are Struggling to Break through the ‘Bamboo Ceiling,’” *ABC News*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-02/asian-australians-struggling-to-break-bamboo-ceiling/11665288>.

⁹⁶ Blackburn, “What Is the Model Minority Myth?”

⁹⁷ Daniel Hurst, “Australia Insists WHO Inquiry into COVID Origin Must Be Robust, despite China Tensions,” *The Guardian*, December 28, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/29/australia-insists-who-inquiry-into-covid-origin-must-be-robust-despite-china-tensions>.

response sparked fear and distrust towards Chinese people and increased anti-Asian sentiment in Australia.

Anti-Asian Sentiment and Violence During COVID-19

As many experienced and watched the world shut-down and dramatically change in March and April of 2020, the pandemic incited fear. Fear of an intangible virus, fear of where it came from, and fear of the people most closely associated with it. In an article discussing COVID nationalism, Guobin Yang argues that:

Tensions become particularly unbearable when contemporary insults are added to past traumas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, incidents of racism and discrimination against ethnic Chinese were widely reported around the world. These painful stories invariably spread to Chinese social media users, thus exacerbating a sense of fear of the foreign. Chinese official media covered some of these stories. Chinese students abroad reported personal experiences to friends and families back home. WeChat accounts run by overseas Chinese, of which there are many, translated and distributed such stories to ethnic Chinese communities around the world. Pandemic diaries written by overseas ethnic Chinese and Chinese students in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Manila, Canada, and the United States blossomed on WeChat and Weibo, reaching the same audiences as the diaries produced inside China.⁹⁸

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted a fear of China to a broader fear of Asian people. Fear stimulates different reactions in people, but the fear of Asian people following the world shutting down triggered an increase in violence towards Asians globally. According to a Washington Post article, “In Australia — an English-speaking country where 12 percent of the population is of Asian descent, and where immigration policies also have an exclusionary history — nearly 1 in 5 Chinese Australians report physical or verbal abuse since the pandemic began. Anti-Asian sentiment is a global concern, [their] research

⁹⁸ Yang, “COVID Nationalism,” 165.

finds.”⁹⁹ However, this article only includes Chinese Australians in their polling. In a study on racial profiling during the pandemic, Xiao Tan states “The Asian population is a diverse group that comprises individuals from multiple national origins and languages. Despite this diversity, Asian communities have reported a shared experience of discrimination.”¹⁰⁰ As a racial subgroup, many ethnicities within the Asian subgroup reported being harassed and or attacked.¹⁰¹ In April 2020, “A survey focusing on Covid-19-related racism against Asians and Asian-Australians recorded 178 incidents during the first two weeks of April countrywide.”¹⁰² While 178 incidents may not seem like a large number, in 2021 in Canada, there were about 943 reported incidents to covidracism.ca in an entire year.¹⁰³ 178 incidents in just two weeks is alarming.

In a triggering account, a woman aged 19 in Sydney, who identifies as Vietnamese Australian reported, she was “Told to stay away from [an assailant] because [she is] Asian so [she has] coronavirus. Told that it was [her] people who brought the virus over here. Attempted to kick [her]. Called [her] an Asian slut and an Asian dog. Told [her] to go eat a bat. Threatened [her] with a knife. Spat in [her] face getting spit in [her] left eye.”¹⁰⁴ This woman’s experience comes from a preliminary report released by

⁹⁹ Lee, Tan, and Ruppner, “Anti-Asian Bias Isn’t Just an American Problem: The Pandemic Has Revived Old Stereotypes around the World.”

¹⁰⁰ Xiao Tan, Rennie Lee, and Leah Ruppner, “Profiling Racial Prejudice during COVID-19: Who Exhibits Anti-Asian Sentiment in Australia and the United States?,” *The Australian Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 4 (December 2021): 465, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.176>.

¹⁰¹ Lee, Tan, and Ruppner, “Anti-Asian Bias Isn’t Just an American Problem: The Pandemic Has Revived Old Stereotypes around the World.”

¹⁰² “Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide: National Action Plans Needed to Counter Intolerance,” *Human Rights Watch News*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide#>.

¹⁰³ RepresentASIAN Project, Twitter Post. March 30 2022, 6:56 AM, <https://twitter.com/repasianproject/status/1509167617159970819/photo/2>.

¹⁰⁴ Osmond Chiu and Asian Australian Alliance, “COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS RACISM INCIDENT REPORT: Reporting Racism Against Asians in Australia Arising Due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus

the Asian Australian Alliance and Osmond Chiu, research consisted of qualitative reports (direct quotations from victims of assault), and quantitative data both pooled from an online survey that was launched on April 2nd, 2020.¹⁰⁵ There are multiple intersections of racism and discrimination that her report details. First, she was assumed to have the coronavirus based on her appearance. Second, in harsh generalization, she was told it was her people who brought the virus, despite being Vietnamese Australian. Third, the assailant attempted to physically assault her. Fourth, she was subjected to stereotypical fetishization as an Asian woman. Fifth, she was called a dog, and told to eat a bat, further stereotypes, and generalizations that Asians are dirty and uncivilized and eat foods that are considered gross in the western world. Sixth, she was further threatened with physical violence and spat on. The account from the 19-year-old woman from Sydney is not rare. Osmond Chiu's report highlighted the stories of multiple Asian Australians with similar experiences. Many victims were threatened, spat on, subjected to racialized slurs, and were told to go back to China, even if they did not identify as ethnically Chinese.¹⁰⁶

Effect on Foreign Policy

Australia was one of the first countries to officially ban travel to and from China. While some countries and their COVID-19 committees were under the impression that imposing travel bans just on China at the time would stop the importation of the virus, a study on this theory demonstrated that “the majority of the reported 66 cases were

Pandemic” (Asian Australian Alliance, June 2020), 12, <https://asianaustalianalliance.net/covid-19-coronavirus-racism-incident-report/covid-19-racism-incident-report-preliminary-report/>.

¹⁰⁵ Chiu and Asian Australian Alliance, “COVID-19 Coronavirus Racism Incident Report: Reporting Racism Against Asians in Australia Arising Due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic,” 7.

¹⁰⁶ Chiu and Asian Australian Alliance, “COVID-19 Coronavirus Racism Incident Report: Reporting Racism Against Asians in Australia Arising Due to the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic.”

actually linked with travel from countries other than China.”¹⁰⁷ These bans on travel against China furthered an anti-China, and wider anti-Asian, narrative in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the theory that banning travel would stop the spread, the virus was past containment and Australia’s initial stance in the banning of travel furthered a belief that people in China should not be let in. These travel policies added to negative sentiments and amplified fear. Politically, Australia’s travel bans on China created economic tensions since leading up to the pandemic Australia heavily relied on China for exports.¹⁰⁸ While these tensions led to China’s imposition of restrictions, overall, it did not hurt Australia’s economy to a significant extent.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Australia has a cruel history of dealing with nonwhite groups. From the brutal treatment of Aboriginals not explicitly discussed or described in this thesis to the exclusion of Asians, Australians have acted in fear towards minority groups.¹¹⁰ In establishing dominance, the Australian government constructed fear strategically to influence political support and socially influence its people. Doing so has perpetuated a culture of fear toward Asians with the intentions of building a White Australian national identity.¹¹¹ Since the government has instilled this fear, Asian-invasion literature and

¹⁰⁷ Australian Government - Department of Health. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Epidemiology Reports. Australia. 2020. **quoted in** Angus McLure, Colleen L Lau, and Luis Furuya-Kanamori, “Has the Effectiveness of Australia’s Travel Bans against China on the Importation of COVID-19 Been Overestimated?,” *Journal of Travel Medicine* 28, no. 2 (February 23, 2021): taaa191, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa191>.

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Wilson, “Australia Shows the World What Decoupling From China Looks Like,” *Foreign Policy*, November 9, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/09/australia-china-decoupling-trade-sanctions-coronavirus-geopolitics/>.

¹⁰⁹ Wilson, “Australia Shows the World What Decoupling From China Looks Like.”

¹¹⁰ Gale, *A Politics of Fear in Australia: Representations of Refugees in the Media*, 2.

¹¹¹ Mansfield, “The Origins of ‘White Australia.’”

narratives have periodically reinforced and validated these fears. This culture remains unchanged in the 21st century following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Asians have been scapegoated in Australian history and received brutal treatment from the Australian government and white Australians. The only way to change these perceptions is to recognize the past and learn from it to move on. It is nearly impossible to shift the current narrative without consistent education on these matters.

Conclusion

The politics of fear is studied to understand how fear can be used to influence policy decisions and garner public support. Much of the existing literature relates the politics of fear to anti-terrorism policies and other fear inducing incidents that have influenced the society we live in today. However, much of the current literature fails to examine the connection between the politics of fear and anti-Asian sentiment and racism. My thesis demonstrates the connections between government constructed fear towards Asians which has led to continued discrimination prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. My thesis also underscores how the existing anti-Asian attitudes and fears have impacted the current perception of Asians within predominantly white, Liberal democracies, and more broadly across the world.

Governmental construction of anti-Asian sentiment in the late 1800s and early 1900s has significantly affected Asians worldwide. While early fears stemmed from myths about Chinese people spreading diseases or stealing jobs from white citizens, different aspects of government influence have continued to instill a widespread fear of Asian individuals. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these fears, due in part to an institutionalized rhetoric of fear. The Asian experience across nations varies to certain degrees, but striking similarities between western, predominantly white liberal democracies demonstrate the commonality of discrimination and racism against Asians across centuries. While many judgments have painted false narratives and exploited negative stereotypes, our society still has yet to unlearn these egregious characterizations.

The lack of consistent historical education further impacts these skewed narratives of Asian people. In my research, polarized scholarship demonstrates the politicization of Asians. Since there is inconsistent recounting and dedication to these important moments of history, there is not enough education about the ways that discrimination and marginalization manifest themselves in modern societies. Standardizing and focusing the narrative on traditionally marginalized voices will aid our future in terminating discrimination and will hopefully eradicate the engrained culture of fear and discrimination of Asians globally.

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